TJC Touchstone
2000

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Unexpected *Karin G. Long*

Foreword

Rules, guidelines, regulations — all barriers authorities utilize to keep us in a single file line. We are born marching and most of us continue to do so until the day we die, always in a straight line, making few divergences from the beaten trail. Art, in any form, dares to step out of line. It breaks the rules, it surpasses the guidelines and shatters the barrier of status-quo.

This is why some of the most influential and important people in the history of our planet were artists. Many were artists of the mind — creating wonderful compositions of philosophy, prose and literature, much of which we still study today. Others were artists of the eye who could work magic with a paintbrush or turn a cold piece of marble into a warm glowing masterpiece. Still others were artists of the ear, bringing a multitude of diverse instruments into harmony with each other, making what could once only be described as an emotional feeling into a tangible auditory experience. These great men and women made a difference in history.

Though it is small, we hope this magazine will also make a difference. As you read this year's offering, may you consider the words of master poet Robert Frost, "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I — I took the one less traveled by....."

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Pucker Up *Sondra Hall*

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The Title

A distinctive streak left on a black touchstone when rubbed with genuine silver or gold was a foolproof test which allowed ancient civilizations to trust using coins to trade. We trust that you,too, will find genuine distinctive elements of value in the TJC Touchstone.

Carolyn Hendon
1986

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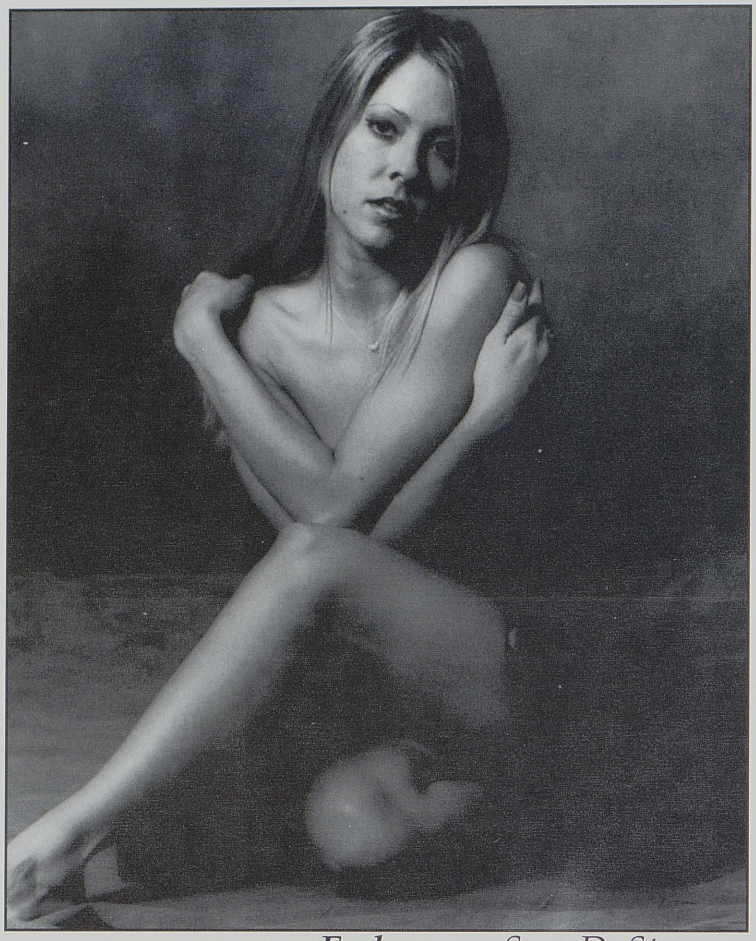


Embrace *Sara D. Stevens*

Symbiosis

Angelique A. Roshto

She was refined beauty wrapped in elegance.
Slender lines accented by lyrical curves.
Cultivated rose brushed fingernails,
Pale magnolia skin.
Exquisite elongated legs that kissed
Soft cashmere and eyes.

She was sophistication wrapped in confidence.
Steps of perpetual correctness,
She controlled gravity.
Symphonies floated serenely through her mind,
Money painted water lilies on her words.

She was violet lavender iris wrapped in scarlet rose.
Chipped ice draped with severe pearls.
Stone sculpted by Michelangelo,
Stained glass windows.
Immaculate, she stood in front of him.
Entranced he fell in worship.

The other was wild daisies wrapped in morning glories.
Skinned knees and torn nails.
Sharp angles accented by bone.
Her equation was perpendicular,
She ran in spiral circles.

She was unrestrained freedom wrapped in glitter.
Menthol cigarettes inhaled through raw mouth.
Erotic harmonicas and violating trumpets
Sang her brutal existence.
Van Gogh painted mad sunflowers
Across her upturned face.

She was beautiful love wrapped in pornography.
Sexual calamity behind teeth that bite.
Sun blistered shoulders,
Savage sapphire eyes.
Fearless and naked, she stood in front of him.
Heroic and upright, he held her high.

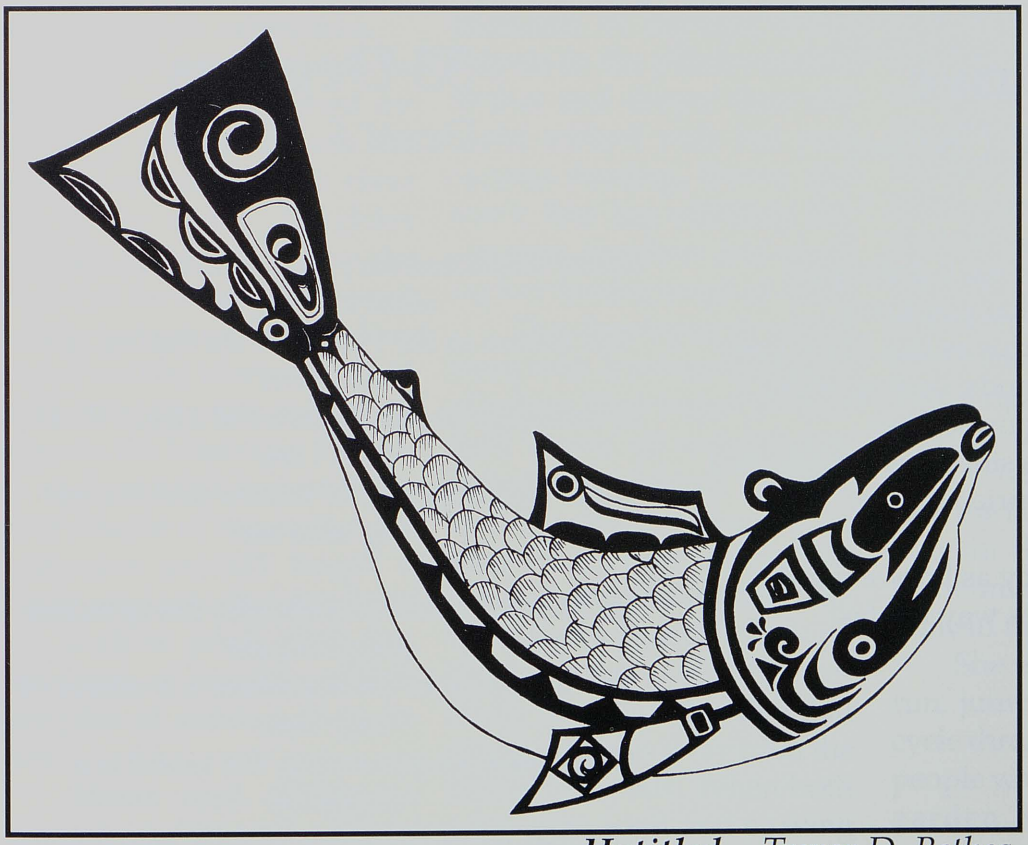
All God's Creatures

Carol A. Martin

In the still and quiet early morning hours, lounging in my favorite spot on our expansive porch, I spy the intense efforts of a garden spider. She painstakingly spins her web without the slightest distraction or concern about being studied. Delicate threads knitted with meticulous care construct the foundation of her universe. Droplets of dew clinging to individual strands of webbing reflect the morning's first light, resembling tiny diamonds, giving the illusion of a hand-crafted lace doily.

As I continue to contemplate the insect's tenacious labor, I am reminded that all of God's creatures are endowed with distinctive talents and skills. In the spider's thread house, I see more than an elaborate layout created by one of nature's more menacing creatures. I see a blueprint of our world, revealing how each life intricately connects to other lives, ultimately forming a mighty network with every knot being dependent upon each individual strand.

The spider, with her inbred instincts and skills, has demonstrated to me that the world we create by sharing our unique gifts and abilities is more than merely a place to live — it is our refuge. It should be cared for and guarded as persistently as the spider tends her web. If we collectively nurture and repair our world, love and value family and friends, our homes will provide shelter and support when life's trials weigh heavily upon our framework.



Untitled *Trevor D. Bethea*

Crush *Trevor D. Bethea*

Drive

Paul R. Cooksey

Who's to say, we'll drift apart
This is what you know
Frozen sorrow drips as this flame goes
Burning both ends, cutting wicks
Telling myself lies
Counting the days since this sorrow died
We've buried it alive

Stars stream by as I drive home
Sometimes way too fast

33 Degrees

David S. Musick

There's a momentary madness in my constant moving on
The reason in the yellow of the fading light of dawn
Somewhere in the shadows of a light that I can't see
Is the haunting face of sorrow and it's coming after me

As I turn to face the midnight, the spiraling stars of space
The reflection in the blackness is a mirror of my face
Consequences screaming, the world is a disease
Nuclear winter freezing, gimme two scoops, please!

A Mother's Memory

Zella Haynes-Causey

As a mother, I have always enjoyed watching my children as they engaged in various activities, some rather entertaining and often unforgettable.

Last summer my two lovely daughters, 12 and 7 years old, decided to try their luck at catching tadpoles. On their grandparents' farm was a shallow pond abounding with frogs in various forms of metamorphosis. To capture tadpoles certain items were needed: a bucket, a quart Mason jar and a minnow dip net. With the necessary equipment commandeered and an organized plan established, they set off on their expedition.

After the short walk to the pond, they examined the territory and staked out the best location to catch their prey. My older daughter dipped the bucket into the water at the edge of the pond while my younger daughter stood waiting to retrieve them with the dip net and place them in the Mason jar. The approach worked out well the first couple of times, but the tadpoles quickly began a hasty retreat to the middle of the shallow pond. With this new turn of events, a different plan of action was in order.

Shoes and socks removed, my two daughters began their chase after the tadpoles. Once in the middle of the pond, they stood quietly waiting for the water to settle and the tadpoles to start stirring. Then both girls began dipping for all they were worth with the Mason jar and the bucket, the minnow dip net discarded on the dry bank.

Murky water was flying about both of them in the frenzy to capture the most tadpoles possible. By this time the slimy pond floor was becoming even more difficult to stand on , as their every move disturbed the sediment making their footing very unstable. Suddenly it happened, my older daughter in her enthusiasm to capture every tadpole in the pond, reached further and deeper than she could control with her precarious footing. Down she went, her leg striking my younger daughter and causing her footing to go as well.

This development would bring with it yet another plan of action. They began a water fight to end all water fights. Splashing, kicking, yelling, and laughing at the top of their lungs, they were creating an outrageous ruckus. The ruckus was probably making the tadpoles wish they already had their legs, so that they could hop away from the frantic escapade. When both were exhausted and soaking wet, they remembered the purpose of their expedition and gathered their equipment, plus a quart Mason jar brimming with tadpoles.

When they returned to their grandparents' house, I asked them what they thought they had been doing, even though I knew full well. Standing there wet and dripping, looking like female versions of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, my youngest daughter plunged her hand to the bottom of the Mason jar to bring forth a tadpole between her thumb and forefinger. Holding her wriggling trophy high for all to see, she announced, mischievously, "We've been tadpole hunting, Mom."

When my younger daughter was 6, she was in love with summer rain — not warm summer showers that cool the day and green the pasture. When she thought of summer showers, it could only mean one thing — mud! That's right — squishy, gritty, in your face, unadulterated mud. She could manage to find the largest, deepest mud hole in the neighborhood. Sometimes I thought she had built-in radar for them.

She would stomp, walk, run, jump, even ride her bicycle through them like most people walk through a flower garden, experiencing the same enjoyment and exhila-

ration, except her blooming iris or prize rose was a glorious mud hole. Her favorite choice for a mud hole would be to judge the distance, gauge the speed and align her bike to achieve the biggest splash. Then, with serious concentration, she would mount her bike and pedal as hard as she could to reach maximum speed, the muscles of her legs straining and pushing with each rotation of the tires. Upon hitting the water-filled mud hole, she would stop pedaling and hold the handlebars tightly. The only thing to be seen was a huge wave of reddish-brown hair, water convulsing from the mud hole, the bike and its rider lost in the wake.

As she would clear the mud hole after her daring feat, an expression of pure delight would fill her features while mud slinging from the rear tire of her bike would pelt against her back. As one could imagine, after only a few of these death-defying feats, she was covered with mud from head to toe.

Once the mud hole was dry and all resources exhausted, she would come home wearing the mud like a cloak of honor. Upon dismounting her version of an off-the-road vehicle, my beautiful little girl was nowhere to be found. Instead she had been replaced by what appeared to be a small version of a boggy creek monster. Thankfully, a water hose and good bath would transform her into my little girl again — at least until the next summer rain.

My older daughter played softball when she was younger, from when she was 4 until she was 11. Early in her sporting career she would become quite emotional at certain game events. At particular moments,she would express her feelings with great exuberance. Her most expressive moments would most assuredly revolve around her turn at bat.

She would always approach the plate with an attitude akin to that of an executioner. All playfulness aside, she would position herself strategically in the batter's box, digging in her cleats, causing dirt to fly several feet behind her, like a raging bull at a matador. While performing this ritual, she would stare the pitcher down with a dangerous glare. Next would come the final adjustment to her batting helmet and she would raise her bat as if it were a weapon.

Standing there in full position, she would sometimes look like a samurai prepared for battle, with sharpened sword held ready. Other times, with broad stance and bat raised, she seemed as though she might be a lumberjack ready to fell some great tree.

By this time the pitcher was usually so intimidated you could almost hear her wondering whether she should throw the pitch or run for the dugout. Finally a pitch would be thrown, and if my daughter got a hit, it was usually a base hit or better.

The real show came when she would strike out. A natural redhead, she was cursed with the matching temper. When the ill-fated circumstance of a strike-out did arise, she would turn on her heels toward the dugout and quickly remove her batting helmet, throwing it viciously on the ground. It usually bounced two or three times from her expressed emotion. While she was abusing her helpless helmet, she would kick the dirt in front of her, causing a cloud of dust to precede her as she stomped away.

She would take her place on the bench, with the other superstars, and start planning for the next inning, plotting her next attack on the outfield from her embattlement most of us know as home plate.

Perhaps one day I will write a book about all the adventures my daughters seem to find in their everyday activities. But for now, I will just continue to watch, be entertained and record each episode in a mother's memory.

Stunned *Brittni R. Bjork*

Another Stormy Night

Mike C. Pero

There is a place I need to go,
It's on the other side.
Where everybody likes to change,
And no one tries to hide.

A man told me a story,
Not in the normal way.
A smile left behind to guard,
Where his body used to lay.

The blade is quick, there is no pain,
There's liberty at last.
The body dead, the soul alive,
And here there is no past.

Tell me, old man, why guard your cane?
You're old, and blind, and poor.
Drop the drugs and grab the sun,
And live forevermore.

So here I am with wrist outstretched,
Another stormy night.
Goodbye, you hell I hate so much,
And damn you, wrong and right.

Job Search — A Different Approach

Richard C. Carr

"What ya doing?" Clyde asked as he sat down on the bench beside Red.

"Not much," Red answered, "just watching squirrels."

"Well, how does it feel not being a student any more?" Clyde continued.

"You're grouchy this morning; what's bothering you?"

"Here I am sitting on a bench in the courthouse lawn like all the other old men except I'm only 18. I graduated last night and here I am — no job, no future, no nothing. You see old man Wilson there? See how he's all bent over. You know what made him that way?"

"Old age I guess," Clyde answered.

"No, it's the lack of hope. Living without any hope is the heaviest load a man can carry. Why it bends ya down worse than an ice storm bends the pines."

"Things will happen, you'll see," Clyde answered.

"Ain't nothing going to happen unless I make it happen — believe me."

"Hey, Dan, where ya been?" Clyde hollered to Daniel across the street leaving out of Preston's store.

"Fetchin' Pa a plug of chew," Dan answered.

"What's happenin?" Dan asked as he walked up holding a plug of a Days Work in his hand.

"Trying to cheer up Mr. Grumpy." Clyde answered.

"Oh."

"Yea, Red wants things to happen."

"Like what?" Dan asked.

"Well, for one thing a job so I won't have to stay around here, " Red said with a sigh.

"Cotton will be ready in about six weeks," Dan said.

"Sure, sit around here for six weeks to pick cotton for a month or so — not for me."

"Last Saturday one of them travelin' salesmen was at my dad's fillin station and he said there was a sawmill up north of Shreveport lookin for workers," Dan continued.

"Yea, and my aunt told my mom that a lot of folks are working in the oil fields in Kilgore — wherever that is," Clyde said.

"This sawmill, where bouts is it?" Red asked.

"Don't know," Dan answered, "Twenty miles north of Shreveport or so - I guess."

"Well, you know I am thinkin, of just going up there and getting that job."

"Yes, I am strong. Why I can outwork any man in the parish."

"How you planning on getting there?" Clyde asked.

"I'll walk, might even get a ride. Damn, any way getting there is better than staying around here with the likes of you two."

"You know your mom doesn't like you using that kind of language," Clyde injected.

"Well, when I am off working she won't know what kind of language I am using."

"Well, just go on if you gotta. You'll be back in a day or two," Dan said.

"Hey, you, ya you," the little bald fat man hollered at Red as he started across the trestle. "Where do you think you're goin?"

"Just up here a piece."

"Who said you could walk across this here bridge, boy? You gotta pay to cross my bridge — got any money?"

"No sir," Red said as he backed up to put a little distance between him and the unfriendly little fat man with tobacco-stained teeth.

"Grab him, Dink, and see if he got any money," the short fat man shouted.

Red smelled the man coming up behind him. The stench was worse than a three-day dead opossum laying by the road. Red turned around just in time to receive a blow to the side of the head. Losing his balance, Red fell off the low side of the bridge and landed face down at the edge of the creek. A third rogue

pinned him to the ground with his knees and removed Red's money from his pocket.

"I knowed you had money, boy," the little fat man said. "Didn't your ma teach you not to lie? I bet she would be real disappointed to see you right about now."

Red got to his feet and scrambled up the creek bank. He knew he was out-numbered but his anger felt deep. I would like to kick everyone of them to the other side of Hell, Red thought to himself.

Red could hear their taunts, "Come back any time, boy," as he ran down the tracks.

"Ma'm, could I bother you for a drink of water?" Red asked the young woman busy hanging out her laundry.

"Yes, you can, just hep yourself," the woman answered.

After drawing a bucket of water from the well, Red used a communal gourd to quench his thirst and wash his face. He then noticed two small, dirty toddlers watching every move.

"Are you all right?" the woman asked as she walked up to the well.

"I guess so. Some men back at the railroad bridge got after me," Red replied a little short of breath.

"What happened?"

"Well, first they wanted to know where I was going and why. Then they said they wanted money and I said, "Ño." One of them knocked me off the bridge and another took my money right out of my pocket — a dollar thirty."

"Are you hurt?"

"No - no I'm OK."

"You need to report this to the sheriff."

"Well, I can't wait around. I have to get going."

"I wish you would report this. Those Hooverites claim they're looking for work but all they want is a hand out. Where're ya headed?"

"Up north of Shreveport."

"What's up there?"

"Well, I heard there's a sawmill needing hands and I plan on going up there and working."

"Strange my old man never heard of it. He's been scrounging the whole country side lookin to earn some money. I wish we could get some whitewash for this shackey ole house. You know, boy, things is really tough. What does your ma think about you going off like this?"

"Not too much, ma'm. She's not too happy."

"You got anything to eat?"

"Oh, I'll be all right."

"You wait just a minute now. I whipped up a batch of sugar cookies yesterday and I think we can spare a little summer sausage. I'll fix you somethin' so you won't starve."

"I don't have any money."

'I didn't say anything about money."

"Here you go," the woman said as she returned from the house with a small brown paper sack.

"I sure thank you, ma'm."

"Well, we have to see after one another. You young-uns come on in the house now. Good luck, boy."

Red entered the small cluttered office and had trouble closing the door.

"Just lift up on it and push hard," said the aging, overweight man at the desk. "It sags and gets hung up on the floor. I guess it needs new hinges. What can I do for ya?"

"Sir," Red said as he got the door closed, "Are you the boss?"

"Yes, what do you want, boy?" the man responded with an impatient tone.

"Well, sir, I am looking to go to work."

"What makes you think I got any work here?" the man replied as he spun around his high back chair to face Red.

"Well, sir, last Saturday a traveling salesman came through town and he said there was a sawmill up this ways looking for hands."

"Where you from, boy?"

"Lee's Shores."

"Where's that?"

"About 20 miles below Shreveport."

"Boy," the man said with a hint of disgust, "I don't know who's crazier, you for listening to some traveling peddler or Herbert Hoover who tries to tell everyone

everything's fine."

"Come here," the man said as he put his cigar in the ash tray and laboriously got up out of the chair. "Look out this window. You see those men standing around that shed? They don't work for me. I have 14 hands who have been here for years. Those people are just waiting in case one of the regulars get sick or hurt so they can earn a little money."

"Sir, are there any other sawmills looking for help?"

"There are two other mills in the area and they each have more than enough help."

Red stood quiet for a few seconds surveying the small office. He looked down at the floor that appeared not to have been swept in years.

"Sir, I'm right handy at fixing things. Why in no time I could have that door better than new. And this office — no telling how long it's been since it had a good cleaning."

Red continued his pitch hardly taking time to catch his breath.

"And, sir, I noticed that sign out front — just hanging by one wire. Why I bet there are so many things needin' done around here I'd never catch up. And if I did, I could mow your grass at the house."

"I don't know boy, you look mighty scrawny. You think you're up to it?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I can stay with the best."

"Well, son, you do swing a mighty powerful argument. Go out there and find J.W. and tell what tools you need to fix that door."

"Yes, sir," Red answered as he eagerly started out the door.

"What's your name, boy?"

"Edgar Wilcocks. But folks just call me Red."

All I Want to Need

Joey P. Ingram

Sitting alone, watching the wash,
Everything's spinning, cyclonic action,
Each day is a struggle, no sleep, no sleep,
No guilt, no future, no emotion, no retraction.

Is everything all right?
Do I still have my sanity?
Who am I? What was I? What were we?
Is there life without you?

Feet are dirty, too much walking,
Gonna prop them up some place new.
Don't know what to do or say,
Life is a living death without you.

No. It's not all right though I say it is.
Sanity's gone but who cares, overrated.
I am the epitome of all the things I despise,
I see the struggle in our eyes.

Over now, everything's stopped.
Mind-numbing, heaving-hearted sickness.
God has a plan; God has a plan,
But I'm not in it, not now, What is this?

Tired and lonely, not homesick, friend-sick.
Why can't I see you in my mind, touch you
in my heart?
Why have the fates uncaringly decreed,
That we should spend our lives apart?

It's not all right but I'll survive,
Clinging to my last thread of thought,
Don't know who I am but I'll strive,
To be the one that you caught.

God has a plan for us, but is it together?
Til we meet I live my life by this creed:
You're all I ever need to want,
And all I want to need.

The Quiet Place

David S. Musick

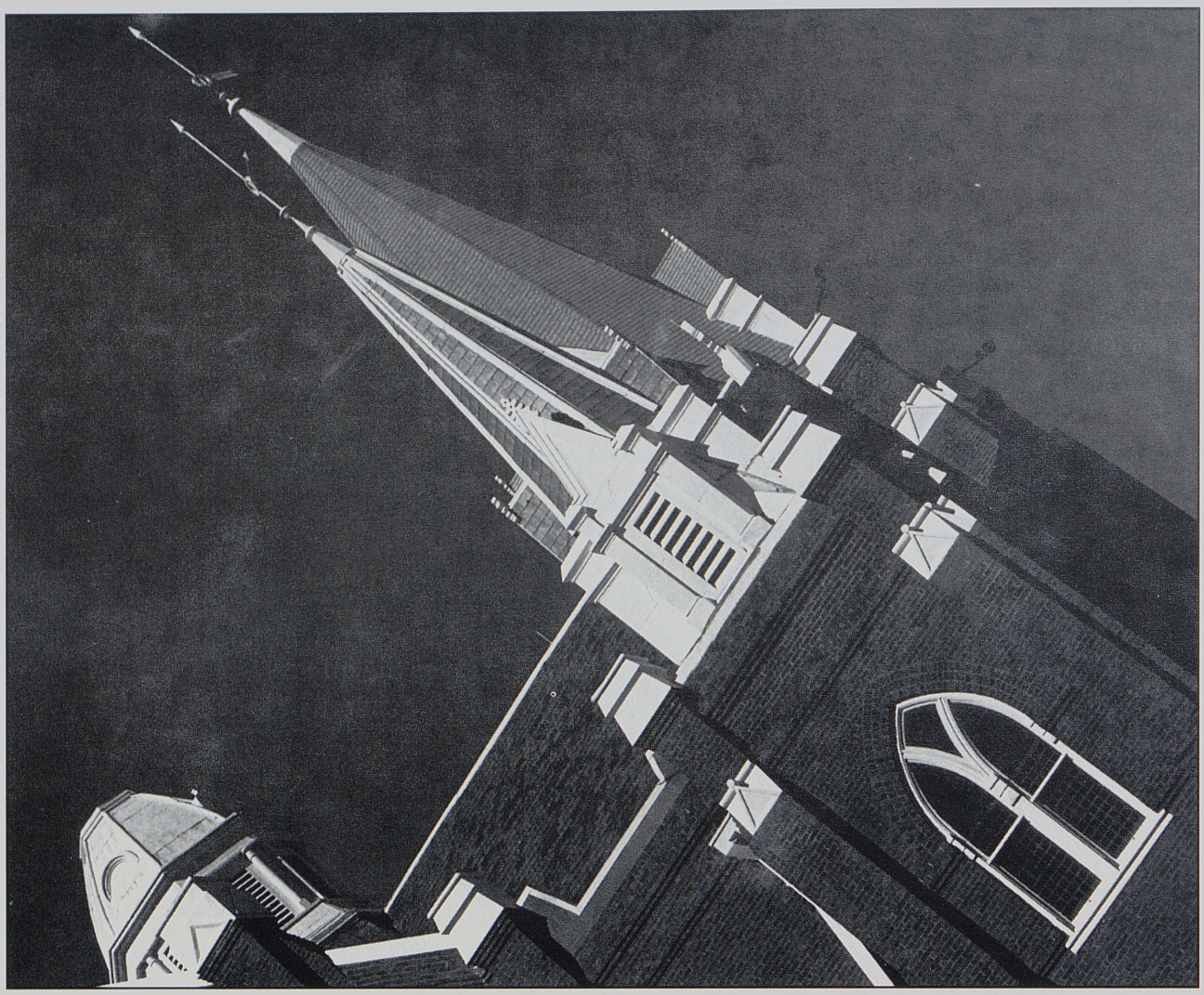
A three-wheeled shopping cart clicks and clatters along a sidewalk highway.
Through laughing kids, dancing colors, pizzerias and pawn shops
He plows on in snaps and jerks.
Noisy venders throw wieners on buns while aromatic winds of the human kind.
Whirl around an outdoor cafe. He moves on, focused.

The alley's close embrace is just around the corner
"I wonder what treasures I can glean today"
The ragged cart driver mused, his pulse racing in anticipation.
"Veggies are good, and sour milk for cheese."
The old gypsy's heart races with excitement at the thought of groceries.

"Ah, there it is" he said to himself.
The dumpster peered around the corner of an old brick store.
The alley is dark and inviting, He loves the quiet.
Insiders will not venture down the claustrophobic cavern of buildings
It is a safe place to be.

The jeers and leering eyes, the unspoken criticial swords stabbing at his soul.
Are blocked from his psyche today.
Today is groceries day, a day of joy, no time for pain, no time for noise.
The insiders are cruel, suspicious creatures
Pulling away from him, grabbing at their kids with disgusted facial contortions.
The three-wheeled shopping cart jerked along over the cracks in the sidewalk.
Today is grocery day,
No time to contemplate the ugly thing;
The arrogance of the enlightened self-interest.
Today shopping for veggies is a better thought.

He loves the quiet,
The close embrace of the alley,
The smell of the dirty dumpster.
The beautiful people would not dare disturb him there.
There, the voices would be silent,
The eyes would be closed,
Their minds could not touch him.
He loves the quiet place.



Faith *Stacy Wallace*

Shipwreck

Mia S. Musick

The whole beach was calm
before I knew I was alive.
Shaking,
I lifted myself from the sand
and let the blue sky
infiltrate my
senses.
The wreckage around me
lay useless in
the blinding sand,
and in the myriad reflections of
the gentle, laughing waves,
chills of
loneliness spilled down
my spine.

Foreboding Fever

Mike C. Pero

I lie within these walls, walls that were built long ago, before I know, before I cared. The fan directly overhead reluctantly performs its daily duty, around, and around, and around, endless revolutions that have gotten it nowhere. The three bulbs that hang from it give off a steady, tired glow and from one comes a dull humming, as if to protest staying up so late. All around on the floor and in between the two beds lie various articles of clothing in different states of cleanliness. During the day, these clothes may appear somewhat attractive to the untrained eye, but when unceremoniously retired at night they are seemingly just shapeless voids of fabric with no apparent purpose or design. On the walls hang several crusted posters. They tell a story of a life desired, sought after and once known. Looking at these posters creates a sorrow, a rage and a longing to return. The conflicting emotions project color and shape onto my closed eyelids and I am transported to another place.....

I see the old life; the sun casts its brilliance over the entire scene. I watch people laugh, I watch people cry. I watch as the children walk home from school, telling jokes, pushing, yelling, laughing, growing up. I remember when I was one of them. Everything was so simple in my childhood days. Right was right and wrong was wrong. I had my friends, and then I had my enemies. It couldn't have gotten any more basic. This place taught me to love, to cry, to fight, to be strong, and it made me into a man. Now I see the new life.

The black from the asphalt and the blue from the ocean slowly merge before my eyes to form a basic shade of green. Green for the trees, green for the grass and green for my heart. Around me I see hatred, anxiety, hesitation. I really don't know how I survived.

As I stand here, I realize I am staring at the epitome of my nightmares. But it really wasn't so bad. On top of all the negative emotions lies a general feeling of good will which seems to neutralize the others. This place has taught me to feel, to comprehend and to know. Sometimes I wonder if this place is working out for the best in me.

Now I see the future. Darkness and mist saturate a narrow and winding road that leads off into oblivion. From where I stand, my eyes are unable to penetrate the cover. Who knows what lies ahead on that road? Surprises, pain, pleasure and insight could await me there, but for now, I will rest.

Reality has brought me back to my walled prison and is leading me down the path of slumber. I will not fight it.

The Code

Mary-Evelyn E. Points

(In honor of Melanie Warren)

Things should be done;
They're not.
Things should be said;
They aren't.

Antidote for Myctophobia

Jonathan Clark

Bring me the Dawn!
Come what may
For here, no longer I wish to stay.

Behold the night!
How she runs
Must have heard my savior come.

Come, sweet rays! Come, sweet dew!
Wash o'er my body, make me new!

Oh the sun!
How he shines
Gives me comfort and silences my cries.

Inevitable

Richard A. Carr

I sat quietly at the table
Trying not to move or make any sounds

It was the in-between time when the darkness,
In its stubbornness, resists the morning light.

The others were still asleep, so
I remained fixed, staring at the bookcase.

The atmosphere was motionless, so
I breathed ever so softly.

Then it appeared, but
I am not sure when.

A small rectangular beam of light
Shown on the third book on the third shelf.

I watched with curious satisfaction for awhile, then
Looking out the adjoining window,

I caught a glimpse of the last shapeless images of night
Fleeing the advancing army of daylight.

Beyond

Bethany L. Scheffrahn

The Solar piercing brightness,
A dawning of His light,
The depths of azure canopy,
He is all surrounding.
Suspension of the universe,
Rests upon His might.
Each microscopic element
He is intertwining.
The silken petal's whiteness,
A preview of His beauty.
The endless gulf of time,
His limit is exceeding.
True sacrificial love
Given by Him freely.
The constant roll of waves,
He is never changing.

The Sky is So Bright

Mia S. Musick

The sky is so bright it reminds me of that place inside me where pain goes to claw with needle-fringed hands at the softness of my resistance.

I could say it doesn't matter, but it would be a lie so black and bottomless I would never escape it.

Best not to lie. Face the truth and let it impale you; rend you. Better to be cut with the clean blade of truth than to sink in the tarry filth of a lie.

In my bitter frustration I forgot how bright the sky can be.

Goodbye to my Friends

Michael J. Racs

Goodbye I say,
To the times we knew.
To our hangout place,
And the acquaintances we grew.

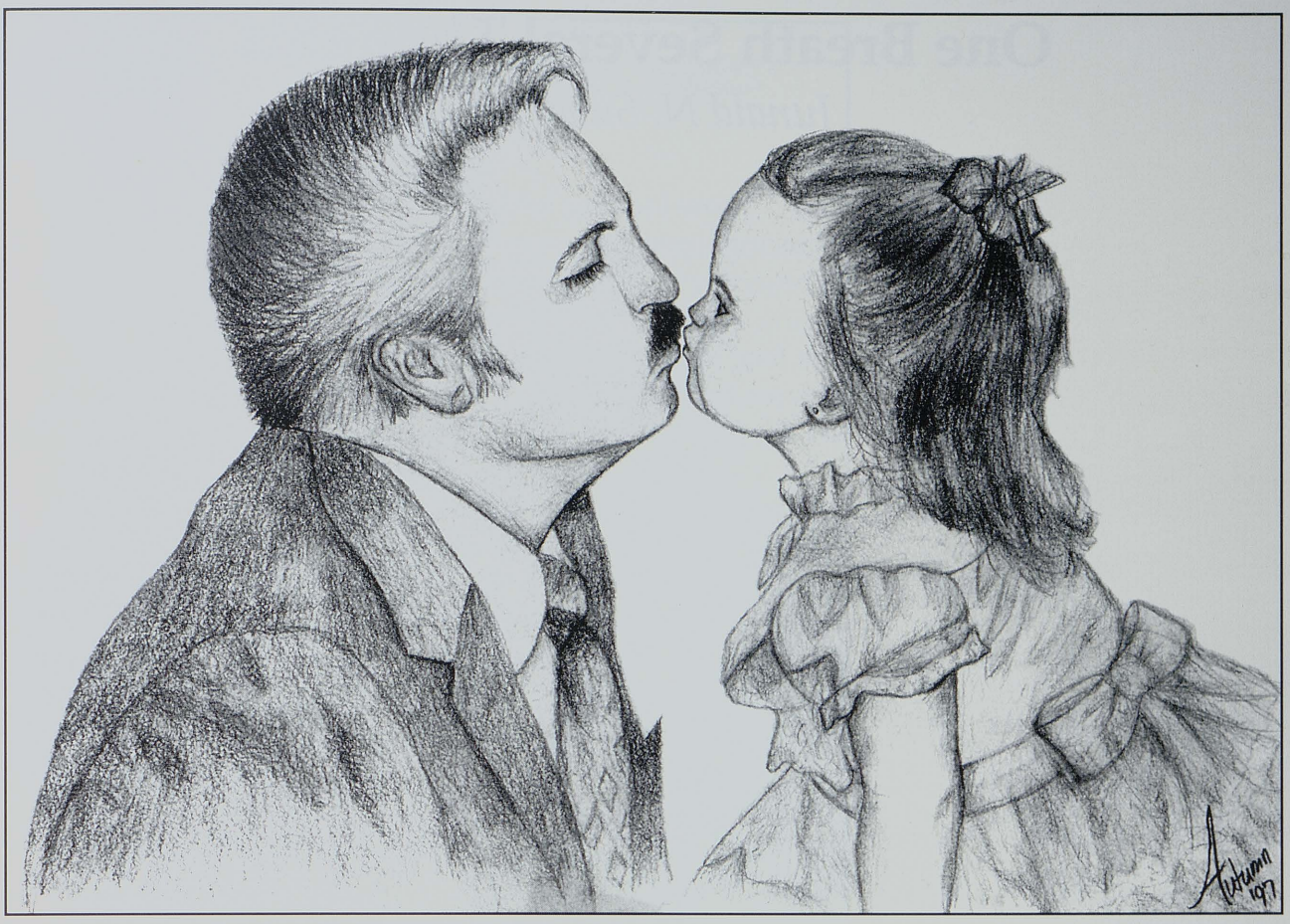
To never be the way it was.
To the end of an era,
the golden years to us.
The games we played,
and fun we had,
to end forever, to become our past.

The separation we face,
The difference between us,
not imaginable in space.
We grew from ourselves,
a life new from our past.
One where our old group,
just could not last.
As our lives diverge
From our unison path,
to take the direction
that fate lay at last.

To the jokes we'd tell,
and the secrets we kept.
to all the fights we had
and times we wept.
I truly promise
to love you always
within my heart.

Memories are pictures
of the times we had
Always remember,
the good with the bad.
Life is short,
and pictures lost,
unless looked back upon,
and clear the dust.

Lazy Days *Brad J. Bearden*



Daddy's Little Girl *Autumn M. Stephenson*

Wings to Fly

Amy D. Phillips

She's still your baby girl or at least that is what you say
Yet she wants to be an adult and cannot wait another day
She tells you she can be no one if she stays at home
And when you look at her you know she could make it on her own

She spouts off about her dreams and how they will be true one day
You know in your heart that it would be selfish to ask her to stay
She looks at the world as just a goal to beat
But you wonder is she strong enough to stand on her own two feet

She wants to be so much, yet you wish she would wait
You still want to protect her from a world of hate
When you look at her you know she is just like you
Yet you want her to still need you like she did when she was two

You know she would do anything except disappoint you
So she gets a chance to leave, what should you do
You know the time has come, this you cannot deny
But are you really ready to give her wings to fly?

One Breath Several Thoughts

Junaid N. Sulaiman

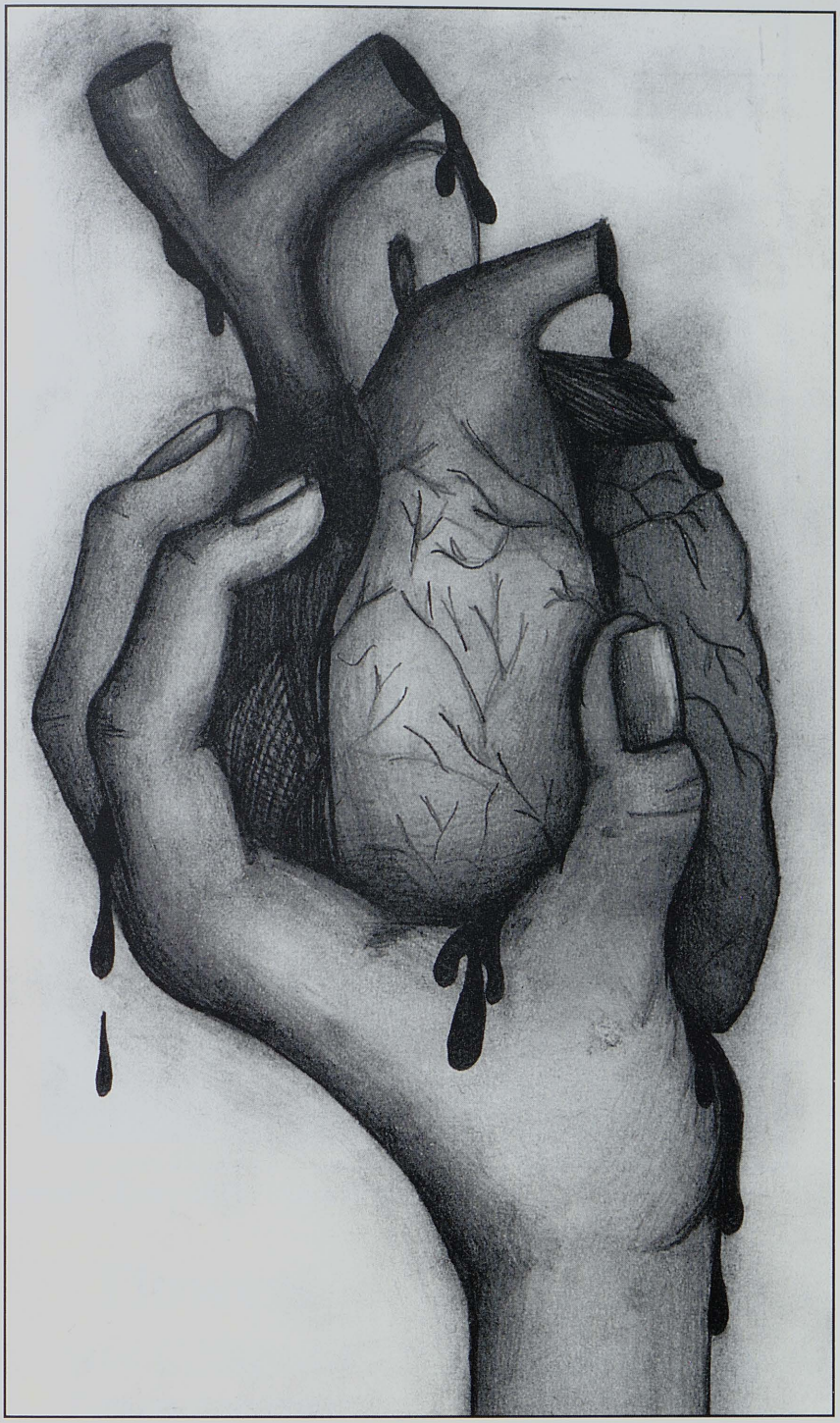
Life . . . now looking back
Glancing upon those years
In blurry reflection at distant window.
Seeing a person, not recognizing
The feel; as though someone or something.
Has overtaken this drifting soul,
Yet stressful in dark tunnel of my mind.

Past memories. . . . .
Drifting thoughts and whispering screams,
That have shattered my humanly coexistence;
With this so-called life,
Prevailing the sweet taste of acid to me,
Ripping and echoing through my blood
In these visible-blind eyes.

Oh God!
This hollow ache within depressed heart,
As skipping the beat . . . . .
That simple sound, ironically so
Precious to this tired flesh
Comes to think of a long eternal sleep.

But these are just thoughts of mine,
I recognize in state of a senseless cry.
I do not know where this sorrow will take me;
Of my pathetic, unreasonable, and unsorted destiny.

But what then?
When not coming back again.
Leaving thy companions in guiltiness,
Thus lying in your eternal-bed,
As you confess to a mess-of-stress,
Realizing, the point of no return
In which you will see
The scenery of hell
As you dance with a devil in a pale moonlight.



Pencil Drawing *Leah H. Hart*

You

Judy B. Rhodes

Born on frozen plains
my heart's delight
was a winter storm
Unaware of
your sultry presence,
I feared
the coming of spring.
You burst into my soul
with tongues of fire,
burning my defenses
and left me breathless
Oh, sweet ravish!
My spirit is torn
but my heart is gentled.

Date Rape *Andrew J. Burns*

It

Mike C. Pero

The tempest broke with waves and wind.
It taunted him with blatant sin.
Around his head the pleasures spin.
But still the mind would not give in.

It pushed him in the corner wall,
beaten, battered, bruised, and all
Deceptive force, continued brawl.
But the steadfast mind would still not fall.

Then suddenly the storm was still
The calm beset with an eerie chill
It stealthy crept beneath the sill
And no longer was the mind at ill

Seductive, It had finally found,
Another path, a way around.
The epitome of evil crowned.
And another mind has slowly drowned

Date Rape *Andrew J. Burns*

Flowers

Sina C. Sigman

Flowers of sunshine
Assorted colors await
Beautiful Serene

Garden

Sina C. Sigman

Flowers fully bloomed
Surrounded by fields of air
Petals full of lace

For Katie

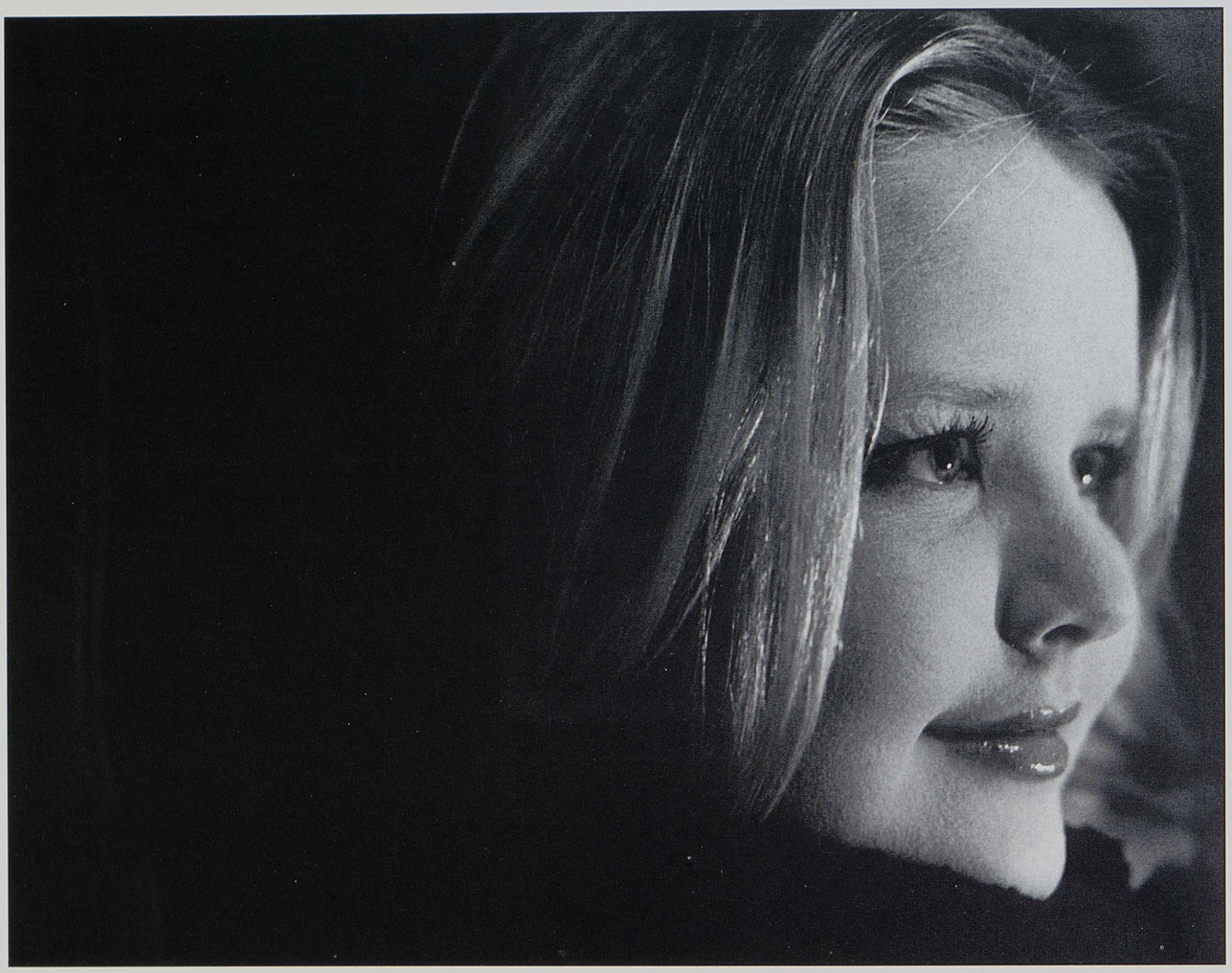
Deloris Harwell

Honey gold cobwebs
Perfect petals of rose buds
Butterflies flutter

For Cassie

Deloris Harwell

Soft auburn locks drop
Short of the slender white
stem
Frame round, rosy cheeks



Belle *Anna L. Vaughn*

Friends

Chinme C. Ononogbu

Friends are hard to find.
They are like emeralds,
Rare and precious.
Like diamonds,
Dear to the heart.
Like water in the desert.
Like sun in the winter.
Their smiles go a long way,
Deep into the heart.
Their warmth, like wool,
On a chilly morning.
Their worth is never fully discovered,
Until they are gone.

When this happens,
The hurt is hard to bear,
The heart pain,
Hard to describe.
The tears flowing,
Hard to control.
One wonders, "Why?"
There is hardly a replacement.
Why must one hurt so bad?
Why do good times seem so short?
And the bad so long?
Why does the heart suffer so much pain?
And the eyes lose so much fluid?
If only things were different.
If only night were day.
If only the past could be changed.
Then the heart would be light again.
And the eyes so bright and shiny.
This I believe is what makes
Friends enduring.
This ache, that makes them
Precious and unforgetable.

Call Us Home

William R. Youngs

Our dreams may give life meaning
And even cause for hope
A prayer provides forgiveness
To help our conscience cope

A friendship lasts forever
Till time itself is ending
The heart felt words I'm sorry help
When our feelings needed mending

Our eyes may grant us passage
To look inside another's soul
And patience slow the heartache
Till we reach our journey's goal

Though knowledge breeds understanding
Understanding has only shown
That we won't find contentment
Till God has called us home

Sunnybrook

Jim Collum

A happy, adventurous world of its own, Sunnybrook forever holds a special place in my heart. The street named Sunnybrook, where I spent my childhood, became much more than that, however. Sunnybrook embodied our house with its secret places, our backyard with its special places and the neighborhood with its adventure places.

The double attic doors in my upstairs room concealed a top-secret corner where I planned world strategies for the neighborhood. A blinking road repair flasher with sign warned any possible intruder of this "Restricted Area." Only recently designated as "UNCLASSIFIED," my arsenal included a Whoopie Cushion, firecrackers, water balloons, Super Glue and rolls of house-wrapping toilet paper: the basic essentials for any neighborhood international agent. All in-house and neighborhood operations originated from this covert corner.

One of my most successful ops succeeded during a social gathering my parents sponsored. The elite of Tyler arrived, and all enjoyed dinner. With the appropriate cocktails served following dinner, the esteemed guests gathered in the living room for polite conversation. I took a position on the dark stairway. A large, dignified woman stood before the sofa directly in front of the hidden Whoopie Cushion.

My dad proposed a toast, then, cocktail glass gracefully in hand, the large woman sat right down: "BLLLRR-RAP-APP-APP-APP-PLUUPHHFLPRT." The sound turned every head in the room. Later, the guests retrieved their coats and jackets from the master bedroom and, I'm certain, returned to their homes with booming gossip of the event.

The master bedroom featured a sliding glass door that opened to a private garden. A splendid secret place for me, the small garden was like a secret with a secret. The garden was hidden from the world by tall brick walls, which were hidden by ivy. I went there sometimes to talk to Summer.

Happy and content, Summer savored the garden. She never told me that, yet I just knew because we were friends. Mom told me the name of the statue was "Summer." A sweeter feminine name never touched my ear. Two wrought iron chairs, a brick floor and a tall wood gate to the backyard stood in the garden. The peace there made me happy. The bricks never got hot, even in the summer. I thought Summer did that because she knew I liked it.

The backyard harbored three special places: the gates, the fort Daddy built and the big elm tree. Sam, our happy-go-lucky Labrador retriever, inhabited every entrance to the backyard and greeted my friends. That Sam: he was three different dogs through the years, although he was somehow still Sam. This mystified me to no end. The first Sam just ran away one day. I know Sam was not abducted or anything because he disappeared before crime or aliens existed in Tyler.

Perhaps the Easter Bunny caused Sam's demise. One Easter Sunday my sister Patti and I woke early and readied our baskets for the backyard egg hunt. Mom had helped us hard boil and dye four dozen eggs. We looked and looked, but found no eggs. Daddy joined us from the patio and suggested places to check. Still in no danger of "putting all of our eggs in one basket," we stood around, dismayed. Daddy saw Sam lying near the garage. Sam's belly looked as though he swallowed a watermelon. That Sam.

The second Sam was a typical car-chasing Lab. Daddy tried everything in the 1960s, including an expensive shock collar, to keep Sam in

the backyard. When Sam ran out in front of Mrs. Wynne's new 1968 Oldsmoblie battleship-class station wagon, that big car crushed his back legs. Mrs. Wynne was a nice lady, but lacked any opportunity to react. That Sam: he just shot out in front of her. Daddy spent a lot of money on Sam's operations, but Sam was in such constant pain that Daddy took the old boy away one day. I wept.

The third Sam was still Sam. He never left or ran out in front of good neighbors. I used to ride him like a horse, wrestle with him on the ground, tease him and trick him. No matter what, the look on his face was always, "O.K., Jim." That Sam: I miss his happy ways.

Our backyard was more than Sam and the gates. Daddy built a small log cabin on the hill out of roughhewn cedar fence posts and slats. War plans originally conceived in the secret attic corner were mapped out here, in field headquarters. We fought many a cap gun and bottle rocket battle in the backyard and alley. Before a major alley battle behind our stockade fence, my friends and I assembled our latest weapon of mass destruction: the pine cone assault rocket with explosive fragmentation warhead. We carefully wedged firecrackers between the open cone arms, connecting the respective fuses with extra firecracker string. Then, we glued a Texas Chaser rocket to the bottom of the pine cone warhead.

The rocket booster slid into a pipe fully equipped with an opening for the rocket fuse ignition match. Fired at the enemy, the rocket propelled the warhead directly into the old Christmas tree bunker, igniting the bunker and stinging the inhabitants with pine cone spurs. The opponents surrendered and we all ran with all speed, before turning around to behold the Tyler Police patrol car at the end of the alley.

As much as the gates and fort meant to me, the backyard also held a special place under the big elm tree. Lazy summer afternoon delivered pure joy as I lay on my back in the rich St. Augustine carpet and looked up at daydream clouds and colorful birds. The breeze gently soothed the leaves. Great white clouds were sharks, ships and sailors, whisking me away to Treasure Island and voyages aboard the Pequod in search of Moby Dick. Red cardinals, azure-blue bluejays and pumpkin-orange breasted robins openly defied every force, as they happily skipped on angel wings from branch to branch. That big elm tree held birds, branches, daydreams and no sorrow. It just stood there with its great arms uplifted to Heaven. I dreamed of flying someday, too.

The neighborhood made time fly on Sunnybrook. Adventure automatically happened in the neighborhood and at the houses of David Adams, William Watson and Staley Wynne. A living advertisement for Schwinn bicycles, Sunnybrook featured every possible bike configuration..

Our standard dare demanded successful completion of the plywood jump at the august "House of Wynne." I loved Staley Wynne. She was, and no doubt still is, the prettiest, classiest, funniest chick ever.

Anything remotely doable to impress Staley, I tried. All the Sunnybrook block kids assembled for the regular bike ramp jump. Staley was there, too. Starting from the accepted distance, I peddled with all of my might, hit the ramp, pulled up the tall Sting Ray handlebars, lost my trajectory, landed front wheel first, jammed my hips in a permanent position between the tall handlebars, and crashed face first, attached to the Sting Ray behind me, with ego in a huge ball of flame and smoke, right in front of Staley Wynne. Momentarily oblivious to the excruciating pain, my brain responded aloud, "Shit." Staley turned, forsaking my sacrifice, for her front door.

Shortly thereafter, everyone acquired a 10-speed, except yours truly. I held no underprivileged status: I now owned a five-speed Schwinn Orange Crate with the small,

shock absorber front wheel, stick shift, orange glitter banana seat and the same tall handle bars to constantly remind me that two terms were opposite magnetic poles: "kiss" and "Staley Wynne." The Bluebonnet and Old Bullard Road intersection marked the starting line of our race. Humiliated in front of Staley Wynne the previous week, I was determined to make my Sting Ray the Harley-Davidson pavement-hugging class "Harley-Sting-Rayvidson." Suddenly, before the 10-speeders shifted gears, I kicked their front forks with my foot, which knocked them down onto the stinging pavement. William Watson waxed hurly-burly over the event and evened the score the next week on the very same street.

Daddy instructed me to never, ever cross the street. After I satisfied the required "homework after school" rule established by Vice-President Mom, I went outside. I found everyone around the corner on Bluebonnet, standing in the middle of the street with William Watson. William saw me coming and said, "What's goin' on, Collum?"

Unwittingly I blurted, "My dad said I couldn't cross the street." "Really?" William said, "Well, we're not across the street... we're only halfway across the street. You won't get in any trouble for that: besides, you dad's not gonna see you just run halfway across the street and back, anyway, Collum."

Yep, peer pressure was on, big time. Thinking it over a few seconds, I bolted out to the midpoint of Bluebonnet and pivoted in mid-stride as my dad turned onto Bluebonnet. Daddy made Rolex look like Timex: Perfect timing. I "took a lickin' and kept on ticking," then went to bed without supper, Staley Wynne or two weeks of Sunnybrook sunshine.

Upon approval of Parole Board, I was released to rejoin Sunnybrook society. Across the street, which Daddy finally authorized me to cross, flowed a sunny brook with a gazillion blackberry bushes. We all gathered the berries and took them home for fresh pie and "put them in a baggie in the freezer" treats. The sunny brook offered no fishing holes, but provided a cornucopia of crawdads, frogs and mosquito bites. The brook was mostly good for skipping stones, playing army and going to see David Adams. We all hung around on the bridge, next door to David's house.

His folks always let us snack and drink lemonade. David had a pool table and I was over there one day when his parents were gone. He showed me all the finer points of the game, when his "super shot technique" came up. David told me to observe him jump a ball and hit another one to make a shot. He pulled back on his stick to secure absolute power, fired and blasted the seven ball upward and forward at 100 miles per hour through the huge plate glass window and into the backyard. I thought I would die laughing as I struggled for breath on my frantic run home.

Another frantic run home began with a stroll out our backyard gate to visit William Watson. Mrs. Watson kept a folding card table holding the most complex jigsaw puzzles in the world. I looked at one of those puzzles once, and I still don't know how she did them. William bunked upstairs, and his room was fun to visit because he had a different model of something every time I went there. Even if they were the same model or models from the last time, they were very different now, because William was adept at creating crash scenes. One was something like a World War II fighter that crashed into a 1972 Pontiac hot rod, which burst into flames.

I exited our backyard and stepped onto the tennis court where William was examining a huge bag of fireworks. The next day was July 4th and William tested a few sample fireworks to plan his big celebration. Seeking a final test shot, William laid the grocery sack on its side to dig out a Texas Chaser rocket. He lit the fuse, and we stepped away. The rocket shot away on the tennis court concrete, looped around and landed

dead-center in the middle of the bag: William was great, man. After the fire department left, for several hours, we remained awestruck at the show we witnessed. Another day of Sunnybrook delight.

The Wynnes' house, two doors down from ours, supplied Sunnybrook children with hours of delight. Constructed of dignified red brick, it featured a playhouse and a huge brick porch with safety white columns, the stage for Mrs. Wynne's Halloween spectacles. All Sunnybrook children observed Mrs. Wynne in full witch costume before a huge cauldron of her caramel-popcorn softballs and approached the porch steps with caution. She spooked us with her costumed appearance, then bewitched us with her treats.

The porch was also the focal point of our favorite neighborhood pastime game, "Jailbreak." An offshoot of "Hide and Seek," the game required a jail to house condemned, tagged players. When the last Sunnybrooker was caught, that citizen became "It" and, after the allotted time, sought everyone else. Unincarcerated Citizens of Sunnybrook possessed "Jailbreak" ability and occasionally freed inmates while the warden searched the neighborhood for other felons. "Jailbreak" filled our summer nights with Sunnybrook magic.

Sunnybrook was not all magic, though. Reality came one afternoon, when I went two doors down to see Staley Wynne. My intentions were honorable. Yes, marriage was on my mind as soon as I saw Staley in her playhouse and nervously approached. Upon arrival at the playhouse, however, Staley was play-cooking on her stove back to the door. I instantly realized my once-in-a-lifetime advantage. I noticed the safety scissors sitting on the adjacent table, and seven seconds later, Staley's 13-inch, braided pony tail lay on the floor. Thus began the day that lives in infamy. The look on Staley's face caused me to instantly initiate a bearing for the Andromeda Galaxy and engage warp five. In the milliseconds required for my navigation of the 15-foot space between the inside and outside corner of the playhouse, Staley selected a softball-sized rock, aimed and hit me in the back of the head. After Mom paid Dr. Payne for my seven stitches, she passed a joint resolution in the house, which required me to place the official apologetic call to Mrs. Wynne. Sunnybrook never knew a dull moment.

Our house with its secret places, our backyard with its special places and our neighborhood with its adventure places mirror the happy, adventurous world of Sunnybook. The first world I knew, Sunnybrook forever holds a special place in my heart. Every now and then I return to Sunnybrook, when the summer breeze whispers of that time, and the colored birds beckon.

Country Memories

Meredith D. Lemaster

Tree tops topped with toppings
Toppings I so desire to taste
Chocolate branches
Cinnamon twigs
Spearmint green leaves in the spring
Butterscotch and caramel in the fall
Vanilla blossoms with a hint of cherry
And strawberry daiquiri sap oozing out in the summer's heat
But what I so fondly remember
Are the memories of you and me dancing the nights away.

Solitude *Trevor D. Bethea*

A Mermaid's Curiosity

Abraham Licerio

A long figure is floating in the ocean. She is watching a small ship drifting along in front of her; curious about its inhabitants and their appearance. Upon reaching the decision to explore the vessel, she cuts across the water breaching the distance between herself and her destination. She begins scaling the side of the ship as small suckers form on the tips of her fingers and palms. Once a firm grip is assured, the gills along her neck are sealed; parting her lips, she reveals a structure resembling that of a baleen whale's mouth. The structure itself then parts revealing a set of pearl-like teeth. Before she continues she realizes there is one last thing for her to do. Clenching her eyes shut, she brings about a series of mild spasms, and is a violent, but silent, outburst, she expels the water trapped within her air-breathing lungs. Quickly taking control of her now rushed breathing, she slowly makes her way up the side of the ship.

She has reached the top but rather than jumping on board, she decided to stay hidden and spy on them.

"Strange," she thinks to herself."they look like the males of my people, but their hue is completely different, although, they do share a certain terrestrial beauty."

She sees four young men of differing heights; three of them are playing a game unrecognizable to her. The other is seated, hunched over a glowing device that resembles an open book. Suddenly one of the three involved in the strange game drops down to a seated position on the vessel's deck. He is holding his head as the other two drop the orange sphere being battled over and stand over him.

"Perhaps he is injured?"

He stands up and starts walking towards her.

"Was I spotted?" she asks herself as she ducks her head down frantically. *"No, I hear him walking down the side of this vessel."*

She follows his footsteps, pulling herself along the side. She pokes her head up in time to see the young man disappear into the shadowy abyss of whatever lies below deck. Gingerly, she steps onboard and into the sunlight. Her blue hair beings to shine brilliantly like numerous sapphires strung together. Feeling the warmth of the sun, she turns her face, closes her eyes and begins stretching her body towards it. Collecting herself, she descends the stairs leading below the deck; after quickly scanning her surroundings, she spots him.

"Is he asleep?"

The young man is lying on a bed; his eyes are closed, gentle breaths coming from his mouth. She approaches him.

"This is the closest I have ever been to a terrestrial being."

Slowly and gently, she runs her fingertips across his forehead.

"Yes, I sense his pain. His head aches."

Spotting a small chair nearby, she pulls it up and sits down as she continues to study the young man.

"I remember that the elders have told us how our touch has mysterious effects on terrestrial beings. It was also when they told us to avoid them at all costs. Who will know about this besides him and myself? Perhaps my touch may heal him."

She stands up, leans over and ever so delicately gives him a kiss on the lips. As she straightens, she hears loud murmuring coming from the entrance. Turning around, she sees them, the other three men. Startled by their sudden appearance, she becomes afraid.

"I must escape! They all have seen me!"

Leaping at the three blocking the entrance she knocks one of them down and rushes up the stairs. Seeing her refuge she leaps into the air, opening her gills before

splashing into the ocean.

"What was that?"

"You mean, who was that?"

"Whatever it was, it doesn't matter now."

"Yeah, are you alright man?"

The three friends turn to him for an answer, but pull back at the sight of his blue-streaked hair and his face covered with green splotches.

"I guess I'm alright, but why are you guys looking at me like that?"

Never Bound

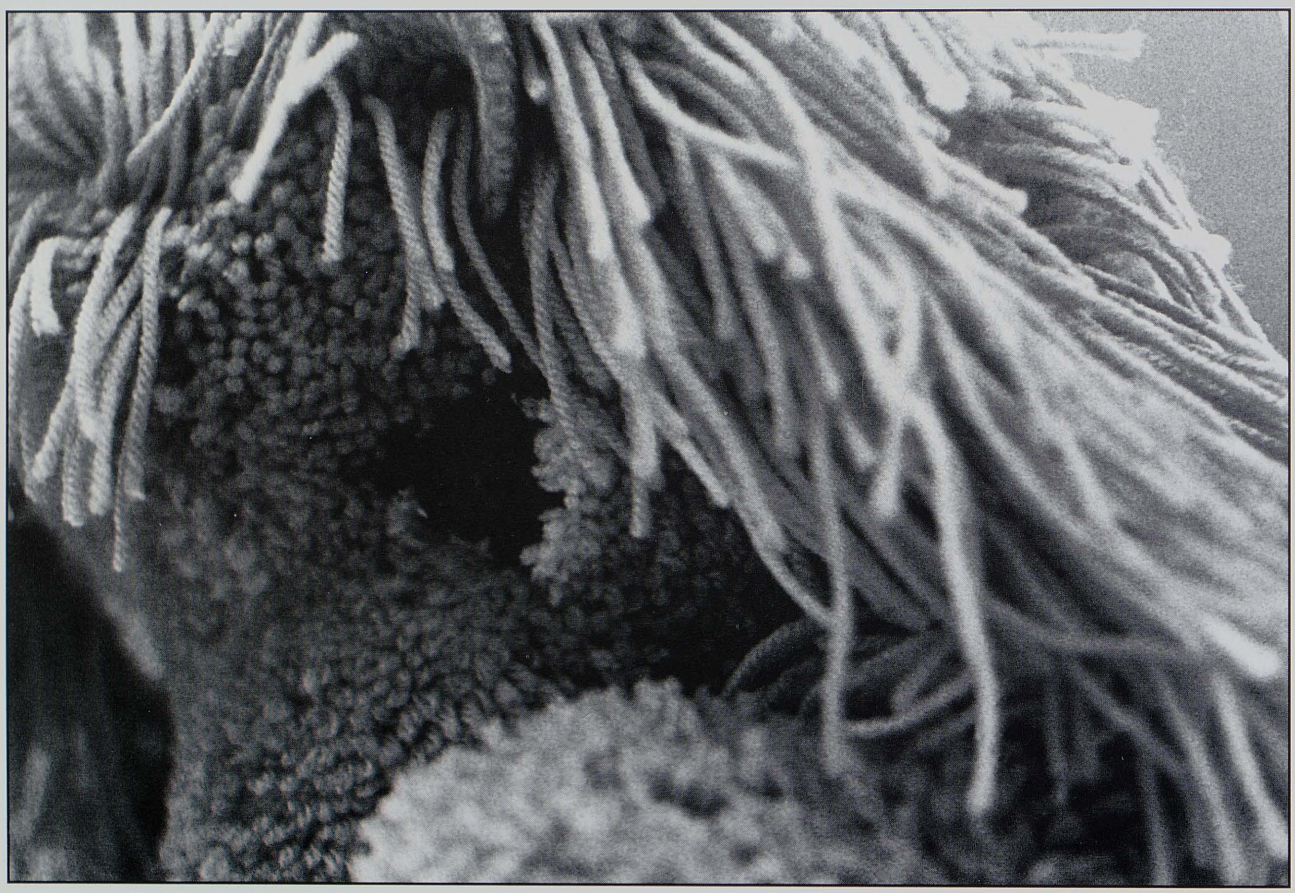
Ronda Wiley

On this tired earth,
Bodies and minds labor, but
Souls are not tied here.

Hello, Child

Bridgette A. Robles

So very glad you're here today!
You make this world so sweet.
Such gentle hands
and loving arms;
You make my day complete.



Ever-Watchful Eye *Kristine M.Kirst*

Wisdom of the Willow

Cynthia D. Nutt

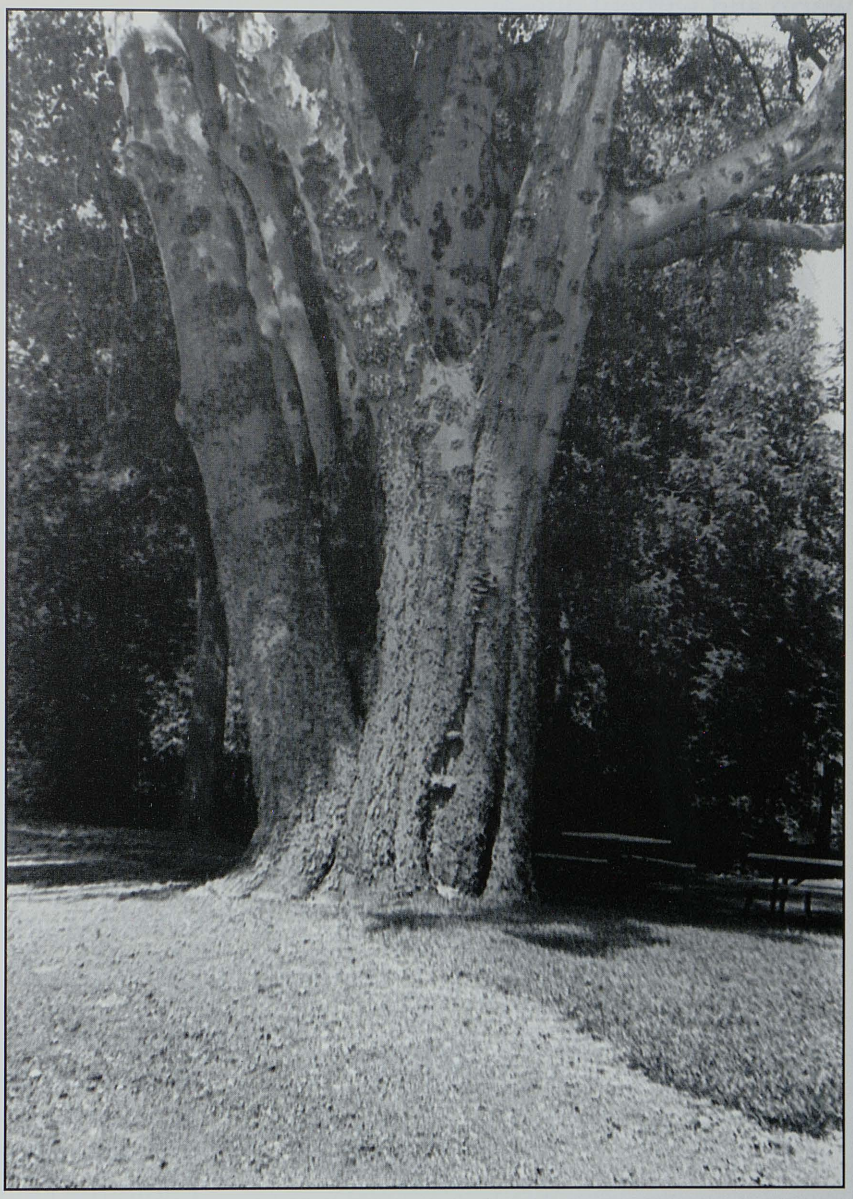
I see the tops of the trees glistening to worship the sun; they wish so badly to reach it. "We can. It could be done," they seem to say, "but we must stay to give shade to the smaller, weaker ones. They are too delicate for such a bright, bold, blaring, blazing, spectacular, glistening sun."

Then I noticed that the mature, more stable, firmly-rooted trees never lose their balance, but only lose their leaves. They seem to say something very different than those months before. I can almost hear the oldest one say, "It's time they had their experience with the sun. This will toughen them up. See!"

Just as the sun's spotlight is on the immature and it seems too much to bear, they notice the beauty of their habitat, the beauty of the change, with its golden-yellows, purples, reds, oranges and browns. Yet, even in the midst of all the beauty of change are those in the community that stay the same: evergreen, evergreen.

The Wiser Ones speak up again, "Do not judge!" That would be a sin, the end. Remember, they are sturdy, they never change and the sun wants it that way. They're still alive – alive, not dead!"

Although there is no changing with leaves of different colors or giving of leaves to the forest floor, they have things going on deep inside them that prepare them for the storms. The sun knows what's going on inside and outside the streams, beneath the bark, under the soil and above all the forest, my love. So no need to worry about others, only thyself.The immature are now looking a bit drained and weary from all the wisdom and all the change. So the mature one suggests, "Just rest. Just rest in the sun and in the still of the night."



A Mystery of the Ages *Kristine Kirst*

Before I knew it, I looked out my cracked double glass doors. I thought, "What a noise!" The community of the forest was alive again and all were awake, loving, playing, blooming. And the trees, the trees were reaching for the glistening sun again.

The immature mid-sized trees were not so immature now because they had noticed the smaller and weaker life beneath them and they protected and shaded this new life. This made these trees stronger, more beautiful, more firmly rooted. Most of all, they felt beautiful and comfortable inside their bark, as the sun glistened upon their leaves and they were warm and without question or fear.

Greetings from Tomorrow

Alissa C. Scott

Here I am, waiting for you
to catch me.
I've always managed to stay
ahead of the game.
Though I never really move,
here I am,
always placed in the front.
I am not the clock,
but time never binds me either.

I have been keeping all
those notes you've written . . .
addressed to dear little me.
Yes, I still have all those
nasty little lists that you put off
day after day.
I hold the key
to the chains of procrastination.

If I had to describe myself,
I would have to say . . .
. . . I am that carrot that you
dangle in front of your nose
as you plod through life.

Yes, admit it,
I do keep you going —
hanging by your dreams
that I hold so cruelly,
always just out of reach.
And even when I finally
treat you to success, another goal replaces
the previous
in a never-ending cycle
of torture and pleasure.

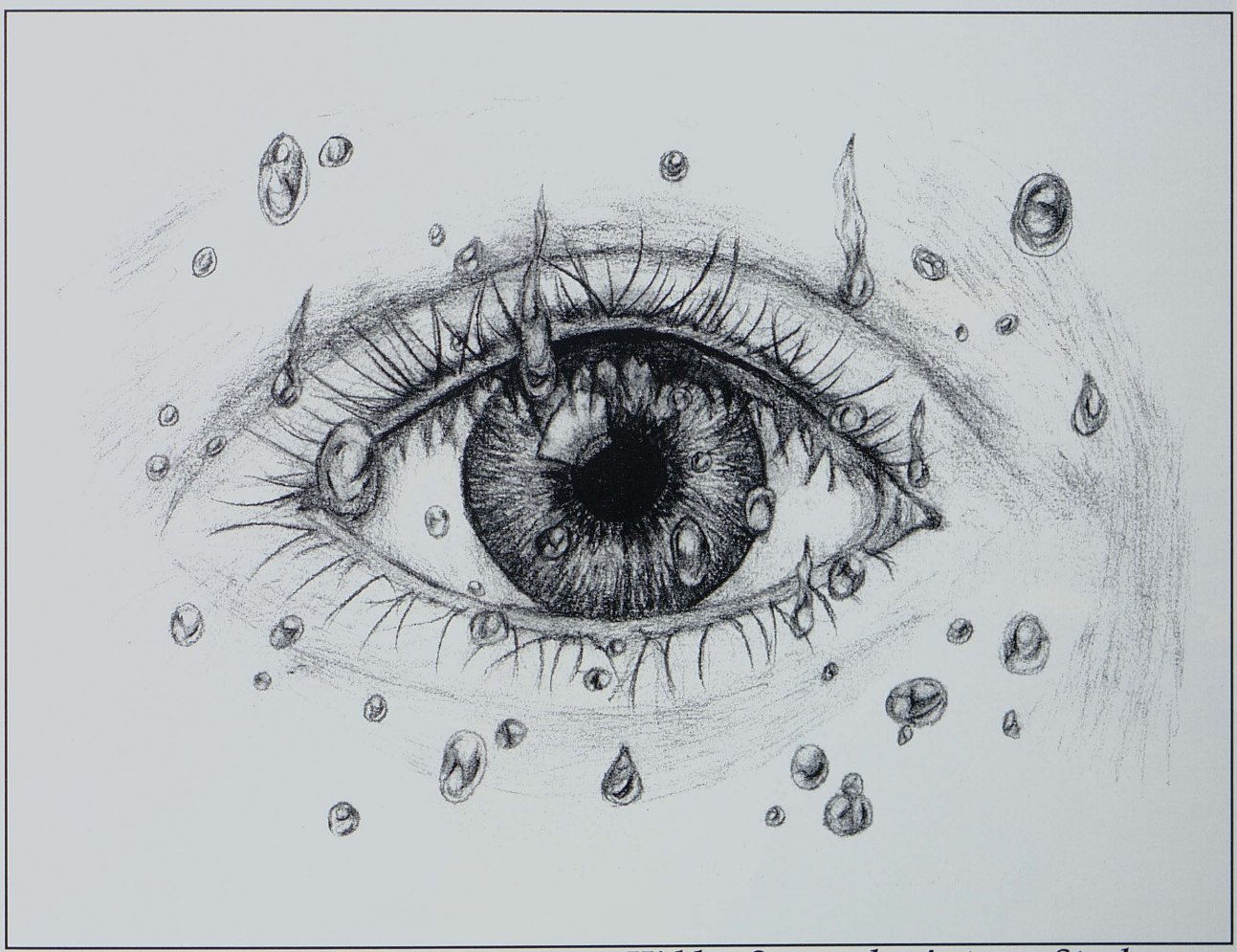
So whenever you feel
like cursing me,
the sweet afterlife of today,
just remember:
I hold the keys
to unlock your dreams and happiness.

Echoes of the Soul

Alissa C. Scott

Poetry is the guide; the map
that peers through
the cobwebs of the mind —
and whose whispers echo
from within the soul.

Poetry defines passions
and sets the spirit in stone
to be read by generation after generation
that they might understand
in their own minds, and see.



Hidden Sorrow by Autumn Stephenson

Lost Puppy *Andrew Burks*